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June 9, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT  
June 9, 1959 - 2:00 PM

Others present: General Norstad  
Major Eisenhower

General Norstad began this informal meeting by giving the President his estimate of the situation in France. In General Norstad's view, the situation shows no improvement. There is nothing new and no signs of a new attitude. The one optimistic note lies in General Norstad's belief that de Gaulle is beginning to learn. He is becoming aware of the effects of his actions on France.

This prompted the letter from de Gaulle to the President, which was written personally by him.

General Norstad believes that de Gaulle will not relax this attitude since it is all part of a long-range plan.

To cope with this situation in France, General Norstad recommended that the U.S. present a calm, pleasant, orderly front. Meanwhile, we should do what we must to provide for our security. Every effort should be taken to avoid an appearance of anger or excitement. We should be considerate and thoughtful, but do what is right. General Norstad concluded that the President might be in for a shock in the event he met with de Gaulle in the near future. The French are counting on such a meeting and this fact could present a considerable problem. The President then discussed his own acquaintance with de Gaulle. He stressed de Gaulle's obsession with the honor, strength and glory

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of France. All his actions contribute toward the promotion of these goals. Such a small matter as the timing of a call is calculated within this framework. The President then reviewed incidents of the past which threw light on de Gaulle's character, such as the difficulty of arranging a meeting when de Gaulle visited Paris in 1952 and refused, on the basis of his prior position, to visit with the President at SHAPE. He recalled that from early 1944 on, both Churchill and Roosevelt had washed their hands of de Gaulle and had told the President, then Supreme Commander, that he must do the dealings. In fairness to de Gaulle, however, the President pointed out that in many of the issues which are being discussed, we would react very much as de Gaulle does if the shoe were on the other foot.



General Norstad expressed the view that de Gaulle actually wants a veto power over the use of our Strategic Air Command. He does not believe that de Gaulle has the capability of wrecking NATO because of the strong reaction against his policies among the other NATO nations at this time. As an example, General Norstad cited the speech which the French General, Bilotte, had made to the Atlantic Council meeting. His demands that nuclear weapons be made available to France evoked strong negative reaction in that body. The President noted that we are willing to give, to all intents and purposes, control of the weapons. We retain titular possession only. General Norstad agreed and expressed the view that if we decide to give weapons away, we will find ourselves in trouble around the world. He himself had been questioned on this point in Norway. He had thrown the question back to the Norwegians and had asked them whether they recommend the sharing of nuclear capability with other nations on the part of the U.S. After a period of silence, the Norwegians had answered "no." General Norstad regards the whole situation as quite unfortunate. A strong France is absolutely necessary. The confidence of the other nations, however, in France has been seriously damaged. He continued with an assessment of the de Gaulle action in withdrawing the French fleet from NATO command. From a military viewpoint, the forces removed were insignificant. What was harmful was the gesture, obviously an effort at retaliation for our position in Algeria. In the matter of air defense, the French are presenting particular difficulties. Here the French are withholding their air forces from NATO command although the vote is against them by 14 to 1. All this is part of the

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pressures for a tripartite status in the world. It is impossible to satisfy de Gaulle's appetite. General Norstad reiterated his opinion that the answer to this problem is in the education of de Gaulle who is an intelligent man and appears to be learning. He commented favorably on Debre and Ely although he noted that Ely is incapable of even talking to de Gaulle. In such meetings de Gaulle lets forth with a series of pronouncements which do nothing but discourage the conversation.



The President said that de Gaulle merely wants to make France the first nation of the world with himself the first Frenchman. Under the present circumstances de Gaulle would be courteous to the President himself, but would maintain the reservation that any concessions made would be on a personal basis, given by de Gaulle himself. The conversation which Secretary Dulles held with de Gaulle last winter, while most satisfactory, produced very little.

General Norstad pointed out the contradictions in de Gaulle's character. He told of a ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe where de Gaulle had taken special pains to make a grand gesture on Norstad's behalf and gave his best wishes to him and to his country. Norstad feels that de Gaulle harbors a true respect of the U.S. and is fond of the President personally. This fondness, far from being a comforting matter, can be extremely troublesome. In the event of a meeting, he hopes that the President will confine discussion to matters which have been handled by respective staffs and which therefore could promise agreement on some issues. He cautioned that one should not confuse the French people with the personality of de Gaulle. The cabinet has been with us in most of our conversations. In particular, General Norstad singled out Debre and Ely as being friendly to our viewpoints. The President said that the French have been "feeling their oats" ever since they had been making such great economic progress with the help of the International Monetary Fund, primarily since Suez of 1956. The President spoke warmly of Pinay and Pleven, which are two of his favorites. He mentioned an unpleasant incident which had occurred in North Africa when de Gaulle had broken up the meeting between the President and Giraud and himself when Giraud had dared to mention such an internal matter as their replacement problems in the French army.

The primary concern of the President right now, however, is that other NATO nations will finally become weary with de Gaulle's attitude and lose enthusiasm for the organization. Here General

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Norstad expressed hope that such would not be the case. So far the effect of French intransigence is to strengthen the resolution of the other allies. Among other measures being taken is the moving forward right now of a second eighteen fighters from the French airfields to strip alert in Germany. In a couple of weeks another eighteen will be moved forward, making a total of fifty-four aircraft displaced from France to Germany. In addition, General Norstad is discussing the permanent movement of some squadrons into the U.K. In answer to the President's question, General Norstad replied that Holland is not a feasible area for deployment due to the high costs involved.

In essence, General Norstad's redeployment scheme is to move three of the fighter squadrons now located in France forward to Germany. These squadrons will replace other squadrons, since he does not desire to overload Germany. The three reconnaissance squadrons so displaced will be moved to the U.K. In addition, two additional fighter wings, comprising six squadrons total, will also be moved to the U.K., resulting in a total increase in fighter and reconnaissance planes of nine squadrons in the U.K.

The President cautioned General Norstad that he does not desire at this time to present a threatening appearance to the Soviets. He is concerned lest such a front would destroy Geneva, although he expressed the view that Geneva is probably destroyed anyway. He then asked the basis on which we plan to retain possession of the airfields from which these squadrons will be moved. General Norstad answered that we will leave caretakers behind since these airfields are our NATO property. His primary airfields are three bases of wing capacity, each located in the vicinity of Nancy. The nine squadrons are deployed as three wings, one on each of three bases. General Norstad added that he anticipates this move to take six months. The purpose of this deliberate approach is to maintain an atmosphere of calm and to avoid annoyance. The President agreed with this approach. He cited one more experience he had had with de Gaulle, which involved his threat to withdraw French forces from SHAEF command at the time of the threat to Strasbourg during the Bulge. The President's own stated intention to deprive de Gaulle of all supplies had been made in the presence of Churchill, who was apparently dumfounded.

After some informal personal conversation, the meeting ended.



*John S. D. Eisenhower*

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